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SUBJECT: ILLEGAL SMALL ARMS IN GHANA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ghana has an estimated 150,000 illegal arms. Most are crude locally made guns, but there is an unknown quantity of arms trafficking from elsewhere in West Africa. Ghana,s Small Arms Commission has worked with the UNDP and civil society on the issue since 2003 through the Ghana Small Arms Program. GOG efforts to combat the problem are hindered by porous borders, lack of police capacity and poor data collection. Corruption in smuggling and trafficking is also a challenge. The UNDP is seeking technical assistance to map the regional distribution, trafficking routes, and manufacturing sites of illicit guns in Ghana and to provide income alternatives to local blacksmiths producing illegal weapons. While the presence of illicit small arms is not currently a source of instability in Ghana, further study of the issue would better inform our understanding and the government,s preventive work to address the issue. End Summary.

GHANA,S SMALL ARMS PROBLEMS

¶2. (U) A 2005 baseline study funded by the UNDP estimates that there are a minimum of 125,000 illicit guns in Ghana. This includes 50,000 industrial guns (trafficked from abroad, leaked from the police, or guns with expired licenses) and 75,000 produced by local blacksmiths. (Note: While blacksmith production is not illegal, many of these guns are un-registered. End note.) The baseline study was not statistically rigorous, but was based on field interviews and estimations by researchers.

¶3. (U) Guns made by local blacksmiths cost as little as USD 3.30 each. Locally manufactured pistols are linked to violent crime in Ghana. According to government reports and the Africa Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR), assailants use locally manufactured pistols in 60 percent of all recorded armed robberies.

¶4. (U) Weaknesses in the Ghana Police Service (GPS) contribute to the small arms problem. Citizens get frustrated with the failures of the GPS and at times take the law into their own hands with locally made guns.

TRANS-BORDER PROBLEMS

¶5. (SBU) More sophisticated weapons cross Ghana,s porous

borders, stemming from conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, or from the more recent conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. During a recent visit by PDAS for Verification, Compliance and Implementation (VCI) Chris Ford, Minister of National Security Francis Poku said, &we concede that we have porous borders that are hard to control. We are trying to get the latest technology to improve monitoring of the borders.8

¶6. (U) ASDR research fellow Emmanuel Sowatey identified foreign sources fueling the sub-region,s arms supply, noting that &former Soviet states in Eastern Europe have few controls on their arms industry.8 The West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) is working with the U.K. to address the issue of arms controls in Europe.

¶7. (U) Sowatey told Poloff that there has been &gun running8 in the northwest region of the country in the tri-border area where Ghana meets Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. He stated that demand for weapons had come from rebel-held territory in the northern part of Cote d'Ivoire and that &corrupt (Ghanaian) security agencies8 were a major challenge.

¶8. (SBU) Superintendent of Police Francis Nyarko, the police officer most involved in handling small arms issues, similarly identified the problem of weapons smuggling from Cote d'Ivoire. &People need money to buy food and therefore they will smuggle,8 he said, adding that &Refugees are not screened properly. There are no resources to screen them and they can bring guns.8

¶9. (U) Nyarko and others highlighted the need for data

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collection. The UNDP is working on this with help from the U.K., and seeks further assistance to map the regional distribution of illicit gun trafficking and manufacturing in Ghana.

MULTILATERAL SOLUTIONS

¶10. (U) On June 14, 2006 ECOWAS Heads of State and Government met in Abuja, Nigeria to sign a &Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials.8 The Convention replaces the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons. The push for a sub-regional Convention emerged from an initiative headed by the former Malian president. The call to convert the voluntary moratorium into a binding ECOWAS Convention came from a collective of civil society groups linked through the West Africa Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA).

¶11. (U) The ECOWAS sub-regional approach is backed by the UNDP,s ECOWAS Small Arms Program (ECOSAP), a USD 30 million program that works to strengthen the capacity of the national small arms commissions in ECOWAS member states and harmonize their activities. ECOSAP is the successor to UNDP,s earlier Program for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED), which led to the establishment of small arms commissions in 12 of the 15 ECOWAS member states.

¶12. (SBU) Afi Yakubu, a member of Ghana,s Small Arms Commission and Associate Director of the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), told Emboff he was disappointed with the recent Review Conference on the Implementation of the 2001 UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Review Conference ended July 7 without agreeing on an outcome document. Yakubu, who is also Secretary of WAANSA, advocates an international legal

instrument to combat the brokering of illicit arms. &You can clean your house up well (in West Africa), but the flood comes from outside,8 she stated.

GHANA,S DOMESTIC EFFORTS:
WORKING WITH THE UNDP

¶13. (U) The Ghanaian Small Arms Commission, created in 2001, has been working with the UNDP since 2003. Local researchers believe Ghana,s Commission is further along in implementing the Convention than in other ECOWAS member states.

¶14. (U) The Ghana Small Arms Reduction and Conflict Prevention program is a partnership between the Ministry of Interior and the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms, funded by the UNDP and other development partners (the UK is the largest donor). The program began in 2003, with funding for 2003-2005 totaling USD 480,000. Accomplishments of the program include: a baseline survey of the illicit weapons issue, initial implementation of a computerized firearms registry, creation of an armed violence database that tracks reports from Ghanaian news sources, and completion of a public sensitization campaign on small arms.

¶15. (U) The Small Arms Commission has focused on public outreach and the public destruction of illegal arms. The Commission meets monthly and includes members from police, military, Attorney General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration service and the Customs service. Since 2001 the Commission has destroyed 2,000 weapons. Awareness campaigns are directed at youth in primary and secondary schools, and include &Weapons Free Clubs8 created in two regions of the country that have experienced ethnic disputes.

¶16. (U) Members of the Commission and the UNDP espouse the benefits of the &arms for development8 approach to tackle the issue of local production, focusing on creating economic alternatives for the blacksmiths who produce un-registered weapons. The Ashanti Regional Blacksmith Association assisted police in the Ashanti Region to arrest arms producers. The Small Arms Commission would like to repeat this success by

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taking the Ashanti Blacksmiths to help form collectives of blacksmiths in each regional capital city.

GAPS

¶19. (SBU) A UNDP official identified the need for reliable data as a significant gap in Ghana,s efforts to counter small arms proliferation. He and one member of the Small Arms Commission were unsatisfied with the work on the Baseline Study, expressing that it lacked firm indications of which parts of the country had the most significant small arms issues. A police official echoed this concern, noting that the GOG has run a manual paper gun registry for over six decades. Because these records are so poor, it is hard to know the number of legal, let alone illicit small arms in Ghana, he said.

¶20. (SBU) The UNDP,s representative and a Small Arms Commission member were also disappointed that the Baseline Study revealed little about &industrial8 guns because of its focus on local manufacturing. The UNDP representative expressed the need for technical assistance in mapping gun transit routes and conflicts in the country such as chieftaincy disputes. He also expressed the need to improve police capacity to handle these and other major public security situations.

¶21. (U) Superintendent Nyarko highlighted the need for logistical support (especially vehicles and A/V equipment) to

support the awareness-building efforts of the Commission. The Ministry of Interior and UNDP are assisting in this regard.

¶22. (U) Sources expressed particular concern about youth unemployment and about the potential for idle youth to fuel conflict in armed crime or as proxies in local chieftaincy disputes. Contacts bemoaned the lack of targeted policies aimed at improving youth employment levels, especially among young males.

COMMENT

¶23. (SBU) In the sub-region, trafficking in illicit weapons remains a serious concern about which we have unreliable data. While risk factors still remain and require GOG monitoring, Ghana has taken a commendable preventive approach to the small arms issue. During PDAS Ford,s visit, Ghanaian interlocutors (government and non-governmental) underscored concerns about small arms and light weapons.

¶24. (SBU) However, in a recent discussion with PolChief, the Minister for National Security expressed less concern about small arms than he did during PDAS Ford,s visit, insisting it was &under control8 and that it is unrealistic to think that all small arms could be eliminated. The Inspector General of Police also told PolChief the problem was minor and under control. More data collection will enhance our understanding of the extent and impact of the small arms issue in Ghana.
BRIDGEWATER